A version of:

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Religious education and childhood in Hungary (1949-1960).

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Addressing the history of religious education and religious socialisation, we often encounter serious problems concerning the reliability of sources. This is true even with regard to modern educational systems, but it applies especially when the focus of our research is the history of dictatorships. Dictatorships invariably use religious education to convey their ideologies or policies, or they attempt to hinder religious education, preferring education to be founded on a racist, nationalist or communist worldview rather than a religious one.
Dictatorships thus represent a particular challenge for experts of the history of education: the task is to reveal the "double reality", indicating the differences and contradictions between family-controlled and state-controlled education and socialisation, as well as the differences between legal and illegal, formal and informal education and socialisation.

In the late 1980s, I started to look for possible means of investigating religious education in the post-1945 period. There were various sources – church documents, the papers of the state authorities that controlled church activities, and religious education textbooks. Naturally, it was also possible to build an oral history database, with interviews of clergymen, teachers of religious instruction, and ordinary people who sent or – for various reasons – did not send their children to religious education classes. Such data comprise useful qualitative sources.

Quantitative sources are found among documents in the archives: for instance, the numbers of students of religious education. However, after 1949, religious education was a special facultative subject. Although it was undertaken in the school *building* and the *registration* procedure was part of the normal activity of a school, nevertheless the whole process was separate from school life. Moreover, the state bureaucracy tended to

make the registration procedure very complicated, while the official materialist ideology in schools was a clear counter-motivation for religious education. Obviously, the dominant factors in religious socialisation – the family and the church – could not be investigated using these sources at all.

There was one quantitative source for this period: the surveys taken from the 1960s onwards. The level of religiosity – as a kind of consequence of religious instruction – was investigated in representative surveys from the 1970s onwards.

In the late 1980s, I tried to combine the two solutions: "oral history" and "representative surveys". I managed a survey on religious socialisation, undertaken in a small representative sample (Budapest inhabitants). It was evident that we needed a far larger sample in order to properly investigate the various periods of post-1945 history and the differences between religious socialisation in rural and urban areas and among Catholic and Protestant families and educated and less educated families. I started to work with the late Janos Szanto, who was working at the time as a sociologist for TARKI, a well-known social research institute (www.tarki.hu). Szanto and I determined that we needed to ask questions concerning religious socialisation in a larger sample.

In a project led by Robert Peter and organised by TARKI, several questions were put to respondents about their parents, grandparents, schooling, and childhood circumstances. Some of the questions in the questionnaire pertained to religious socialisation.

Indeed, there were questions about the religious affiliation of grandfathers and parents; and the responses to such questions informed us indirectly about the circumstances and effectiveness of a respondent's religious socialisation.

- If a respondent knew his/her grandfather's occupation or that of the parents, but did not know about their religious affiliations, this was a clear marker of secularised socialisation.
- If the religious affiliation of the mother differed from that of her father, this meant that the respondent's grandparents had lived in a mixed marriage. This, in turn, indicated an above-average detachment from religion.
- If the religious affiliation of the father differed from that of his father, this also indicated an above-average detachment from religion, because the respondent's grandfather must have granted a *reversalis* (that is, permission for his male child to adopt the religious affiliation of his mother in place of that of his father).
- A parental mixed marriage set a direct secular pattern for a child.

One of the questions concerned childhood baptism:

- If a respondent knew that he/she was not baptised, this was a very clear marker of secularised socialisation.

- If a respondent did not know whether he/she was baptised, this was a clear marker of secularised socialisation.
- If a male respondent had been baptised as a little boy in the denomination of his mother rather than in that of his father, this indicated that the mother had obtained a *reversalis*, implying that the mother was more religious than the father.

Owing to a lack of space, our study does not present these very interesting indirect indicators, since direct information about religious upbringing is also available to us:

The survey contained three questions about religious education in the family, including one general question:

- Did you receive a religious education from your parents? This is the most direct question concerning family religious habits.
- Did you receive a religious education from your grandparents? There are some well known effects in the sociology of religion generating this question. The period was one of rapid urbanisation. The grandparents of many urban children lived in rural areas, and children would often spend school holidays with their grandparents. Thus, in such cases, there was not only a "double education" (one from the family and one from school) but a triple one (from religious grandparents, from secular parents, and from the atheist school…)
- Did you receive a religious education from somebody else?

The survey contained one question about religious education at school; it clearly referred to the facultative subject itself.

Another question concerned religious education at church. This related to the short courses of instruction that preceded Catholic or Protestant confirmation or Bar Mitzvah.
There was also a question about attendance at religious services in childhood.

We can evaluate these factors comparatively (comparing the frequency of religious forms of education that were not linked to the state or to official registration with forms of religious education that had to be recorded by the state or church). We can also compare and contrast them with parental religiosity, since the survey also included questions about the churchgoing habits of respondents' fathers and mothers.

Since religious education at school was a facultative (optional) subject, the official data[1] provide us with sufficient information about the number

[1] Religious education at school became facultative (optional) from 1949 – and it was from this point in time onwards that parents were under pressure not to send their children to

of students attending religious classes. On the other hand, they tell us nothing about the social composition of those attending such classes or the number of students attending religious classes *at some time* during childhood. The latter group's ratio would clearly be far higher than the percentage recorded officially in individual years.

To prevent the various cohorts and observation times from appearing to be arbitrary, we established overlapping cohorts.

Table 1	Did you attend religious classes at school? Yes.			
Birth date[2]	N	Country %	Villages %	Towns %
1933+ - 1	123	95.1	94.4	96.9
1935+ - 1	117	93.2	92.2	96.2
1937+ - 1	137	89.8	92.5	80.0
1939+ - 1	142	91.5	90.7	91.4
1941+ - 1	127	85.8	86.4	85.0
1943+ - 1	129	77.5	81.8	68.3
1945+ - 1	124	70.2	78.3	53.7
1947+ - 1	174	78.2	89.3	51.0
1949+ - 1	225	61.3	76.4	36.5

Approximately 95 per cent of respondents who attended school in years when religious education was compulsory – who must necessarily have participated in religious education – recalled having done so. In this respect, there is no difference between respondents who spent their

religious instruction classes. Summarising the official figures on attendance of religious instruction classes in the 1950s, we receive a fine curve, which – reflecting the extent of political pressure – exhibits a low-point between the spring of 1952 and the summer of 1953, and then begins to rise once more. This reversal was linked with the establishment of a less dictatorial government in the summer of 1953, under Imre Nagy's leadership – who subsequently became known for his role in the 1956 revolution.

Table 1

Summary of attendance figures for religious instruction classes at school

	Country, percentage	Budapest, percentage
1949—50	80	?
1950—51	72	9.8
1951—52	26.4	1.8
1952—53	?	1.5
1953, Spring	13	0.4
1953, Aug. suppl. reg.	27	4.5
1954—55	35.7	7.7
1955—56	40	?
1956—57	30.2	6.9

(Tomka: 1991:32) (Gergely: 1995:142) (Sources: 49) (Izsák: 1985:457) (Balogh and Gergely: 1993:306) (Sources: 345)

[2] Each second cohort is visible in the table. The tables can be viewed in their entirety at the following website: wesley.extra.hu.

childhood in rural areas and those who grew up in urban areas. Among the latter group, the percentage recalling religious education at school falls to less than 90 per cent even among those born as early as the mid-1930s: a possible explanation is that although such respondents must have participated in religious education at school as young children, the dominant memory was their experience as older children. Among respondents born in the 1940s, there is a discrepancy between the rural and urban group. Among the former group, four out of five children attended religious classes at school, in spite of the facultative (optional) nature of such classes and the regime's anticlericalism. Among the latter group, just two-thirds of those born around 1943 and a half of those born around 1945 (who attended school in the 1950s) took part in religious education. Among those who attended school in the mid-1950s and after 1956, the proportion falls to less than two-fifths.

Did this decline reflect parents' intent or was it a direct consequence of the regime's ideological preferences? Examining parental religiosity will help us to make a judgement.

Table 2

	FATHER			MOTHER		
Time of observation[3]	Weekly	Occasionally	Once a year or never	Weekly	Occasionally	Once a year or never
1943+ - 1	41.8	32.0	21.3	54.9	25.4	14,8
1945+ - 1	35.9	30.8	27.4	51.7	25.9	20,7
1947+ - 1	40.6	32.6	21.0	54.3	31.9	13,8
1949+ - 1	36.6	30.3	26.8	57.7	23.9	18,3
1951+ - 1	27.0	31.7	30.2	55.9	24.4	18,1
1953+ - 1	24.8	28.7	38.0	51.1	25.2	22,1
1955+ - 1	26.4	26.4	39.2	42.3	30.9	24,4
1957+ - 1	36.0	20.6	40.0	52.6	29.5	15,0
1959+ - 1	17.8	30.2	48.4	42.0	36.6	19,6

The trend is clear; after a wartime fluctuation among the overlapping cohorts, churchgoing declined steadily from the formation of the first post-war coalition government. During the same period, there was an increase in the share of those exhibiting full secularism. The stronger religiosity of mothers is present in all cohorts.

The sociological hypothesis considers urbanisation to be a major factor in declining rates of churchgoing. The political hypothesis, meanwhile, suggests that political pressure after 1948/49 explains the changes. In smaller villages, party and state officials could observe who attended church and who did not. In towns, such observation was not possible. Ordinary people were aware of this. Indeed, village inhabitants must have feared that they would be seen going to church, but such fears must have been less pronounced in the towns. For this reason, it is worth examining churchgoing trends among rural and urban populations. If the decline

[3] The question was posed as follows: When you were 10 years old, how often did your father and mother go to church?

was greater in the villages, the political hypothesis would seem to be stronger. If, on the other hand, the decline was greater in the towns, the sociological hypothesis must have greater weight.

Table 3

	Rural fathers			Urban fathers		
	Weekly	Occasionally	Once a year or never	Weekly	Occasionally	Once a year or never
1943+ - 1	54.92	25.41	14.75	25.81	41.94	25.81
1945+ - 1	51.72	25.86	20.69	28.00	32.00	36.00
1947+ - 1	54.35	31.88	13.77	30.00	30.00	40.00
1949+ - 1	57.75	23.94	18.31	27.78	44.44	27.78
1951+ - 1	55.91	24.41	18.11	17.50	32.50	45.00
1953+ - 1	51.15	25.19	22.14	14.29	26.19	52.38
1955+ - 1	42.28	30.89	24.39	15.00	20.00	60.00
1957+ - 1	52.60	29.48	15.03	11.54	23.08	61.54
1959+ - 1	41.96	36.61	19.64	5.88	31.76	56.47

First, it is evident that people's weekly churchgoing habits *did not alter in rural areas* in the early 1950s; the rate was comparable with that during the final years of the Horthy era and the period of coalition government in the immediate post-war period. However, the rate did fluctuate later on. In urban areas, churchgoing declined steadily, relative to the rate prevailing during the period of coalition government, while the percentage of those never attending church grew continuously. Having moved to urban areas, the population did not retain its churchgoing habits – even temporarily. In the second half of the 1950s – when repression eased – the share of weekly churchgoers underwent a decrease rather than an increase in the towns. In the survey, the number of people living in Budapest was too small, and so we repeated the survey some years later among Budapest residents.[4] This enabled a more detailed analysis of the urban population.

Table 4

Churchgoing among Budapest residents by level of education

	Never	Once a year	Several times a year	Several times a month	Weekly or more often
Less than eight grades	48.2	7.5	26.6	6.6	11
Eight grades of primary	53	8.5	3.8	17.6	17
Vocational school*	48.3	18	18.2	0	15.4
Secondary or higher	29.3	16.4	34.1	5.2	14.5
Total	43.3	13.4	22.7	6.3	14.4

- These were schools for worker-apprentices, as real vocational schools had still to be established.

We can state that the traditionally secularised Budapest group among the less educated groups, skilled workers, and elite of the new regime (university graduates) demonstrated a strong secular pattern to their children; the middle-aged men did not go to church. At the same time, a feature of both poorly and better educated groups was that in those groups where secularisation was particularly strong, *substantial religiosity was also more likely. That is to say, the groups were pulling in two directions – which means that we must find another explanatory connection.* If we examine occupational status, we receive a picture that

[4] With funding from the Soros Foundation, the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA), and the Foundation for Hungarian Higher Education and Research (AMFK).

can be interpreted by itself, that is, a picture that is not redundant with regard to the education factor. We find that the self-employed – artisans and merchants, making up less than a tenth of parents – are typically churchgoers. Senior managers – true, there are just 14 of them[5] – are to be found in the secularists' group,[6] with half of them going to church once a year and the other half never going to church. Two-thirds of middle and lower managers and other white-collar employees are in the secularist group. Fifty-five percent of skilled workers and production supervisors are in the secularised group, whereas only one in five unskilled workers falls in this group.

At the same time – as we could already conclude based on the level of education – the other extreme is stronger among skilled workers too: the share of weekly churchgoers is more than 10 per cent.

We can say, therefore, that *among the lower social groups, churchgoers were relatively numerous among the self-employed in the private sector.* (This is confirmed by the question concerning the ownership of the place of work. Sixty per cent of self-employed persons were in the religious camp; while the percentage going to church on religious festivals was as low as 10 per cent. Meanwhile, one in two public employees was religious, and more than 27% of them went to church on religious festivals.) (MIA1)

The age of respondents' fathers – according to a preliminary hypothesis – could have influenced churchgoing in two ways: first, because younger fathers had spent more of their lifetime (than had older ones) under the social secularisation of the war and under the unofficial, but legitimate atheism of the period between 1945-1948; second, because of the greater religiosity of older people that arises for various psychological reasons. A third additional factor was that a younger person could enjoy the advantages of "making a secret" of his or her religiosity for a potentially longer time (perhaps even for a whole lifetime). In the data, we can only attempt to separate the various effects by grouping fathers together in various ways. (The classic mathematical methods are uncertain here, as one has to compare two linear variables and a discreet variable…) Without going into long descriptions of our experiments, suffice it to present the result: in whatever manner we grouped the fathers' birthdates, we found that the later the year of birth, the more likely a father was to recall going to church once a year or never. At the other end of the scale, we saw a decline in the likelihood of weekly churchgoing.

It seems probable, therefore, that as the 1950s proceeded, those people who had once gone to church became increasingly less likely to do so. And it is also true that the likelihood of churchgoing was particularly small among younger people.

Despite the evident decline in the extent of repression, fathers observed in the post-1956 period were very much more secularised. Their religiosity was less church-based than it had been in the Stalinist period. In addition, secularisation – which increased as time passed – can still be perceived, even when we examine younger and older parents separately.

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[5] At the website mentioned in the footnote above, one can view the cross-tables that are not visible here as well as numerical versions of the cross-tables containing percentages.

[6] We regarded as secular those going to church once a year or never and as religious those attending more frequently – or at least on religious festivals.

Table 11
How often did fathers in Budapest go to church in the early and late 1950s?

	0 never	1 once a year	2 several times a year	3 several times a month	4 weekly	
Observation in 1950-1956	30.9%	15.1%	30.9%	5.8%	17.3%	278
Observation in 1957-1960	50.2%	10.9%	18.3%	15.2%	5.4%	257
N=	215	70	133	55	62	535
Total	40.2%	13.1%	24.9%	10.3%	11.6%	100.0%

(MIA1)

Table 12
Church attendance of Budapest fathers in the early and late 1950s by cohort group

		0 never	1 once a year	2 several times a year	3 several times a month	4 weekly	
Fathers born in 1901-1910	Observation in 1950-1956	8.9%	21.8%	52.4%		16.9%	124
	Observation in 1957-1960	12.8%	35.9%	33.3%		17.9%	39
	Total	9.8%	25.2%	47.9%		17.2%	163
Fathers born in 1911-1920	Observation in 1950-1956	40.6%	11.3%	15.8%	12.0%	20.3%	133
	Observation in 1957-1960	46.8%	11.3%	27.4%	8.9%	5.6%	124
	Total	43.6%	11.3%	21.4%	10.5%	13.2%	257

(MIA1)

In the latter half of the 1950s, we do not yet encounter the secularising effect of the "consumer socialism" of the 1960s (the spread of a kind of consumer society under the Kádár regime).[7] The supposition arises, therefore, that in the early 1950s some churchgoers used church attendance as a *political code* – to demonstrate an allegiance to the elite of the anticipated anti-communist revolution. After 1956, however, it was no longer possible to believe in the impending victory of anti-communist forces. Indeed, by May 1957, the new government had secured a degree of mass support.

The situation among the country's intellectuals would seem to have been a rather specific one. This encouraged us to undertake a further survey – the third on this subject – with a more detailed examination of intellectuals in Budapest.

Contrary to popular belief, the manifestation of religious belief did not prevent a person from becoming a middle manager. However, it was "advisable" for a person in middle management to go to church less regularly, while senior managers tended to join the secularist camp. In

[7] *In other studies (See, for instance, Járszalag és arena* [Transmission Belt and Arena]), we concluded that the communist consumer society of the 1960s was secularised in the same manner as consumer society in Western Europe. On this we are in full agreement with Janos Szanto.

terms of religiosity, graduates can probably be divided into two groups, according to whether they were ordinary graduate employees or in some kind of management post. Among graduate employees, churchgoing does not appear to have been prohibited or hindered in any sense.

The "mutually disapproving" relationship existing between the communist state and churchgoing is demonstrated by the fact that, among typical intellectual "fields", *two-thirds of employees in public administration were on the secular side*. At the same time, one should also note that more than one in two teachers went to church weekly, a further third of them attended several times a month, and less than one in ten belonged to the secularised camp. This indicates – similarly to our conclusion concerning graduate employees – that even for intellectuals, there were still places where the religious (even those manifesting their beliefs) could gather. Schools continued to reflect the fact that during the Horthy era *they had been places where the very religious gathered – people who accepted the church as an employer as well as the ideological and educational norms of the Christian viewpoint). This was more important than their being an arena for a ideological revolution under the communist regime.*

Among male graduates, those from worker backgrounds exhibited a higher rate of secularisation.

Just over a half of Protestant graduates and as few as 28 per cent of Catholic graduates never went to church. At the other extreme, almost a half of Catholics and barely 17 per cent of Protestants were weekly churchgoers. Thus, in terms of weekly churchgoing, Catholic intellectuals – traditionally the dominant group in Budapest – were more inclined to retain their churchgoing habits. All of the intellectuals in our sample from Jewish families were among those that never attended religious services; Jewish graduates attending religious services were so few in number that they did not even appear in our sample. Evidently, some of the fathers and grandfathers that – according to our respondents – had no religious affiliations may have been people of Jewish background. That is to say, people of Jewish background are less inclined to speak of a Jewish religious upbringing in childhood – partly in consequence of their historical experiences and partly in consequence of current anti-Semitism. Such people are more likely to be found in the "no response" group in the sample.

Having looked at the *social* context of the churchgoing habits of fathers, we need also to examine how other aspects of a *religious upbringing* relate to the rate of churchgoing. We have several data relating to religious upbringing: participation in religious instruction at church or school, attendance of church services for children, and recollections of the religious aspects of childhood. (MIA1)

Churchgoing among fathers and children's religious instruction and "religious upbringing"

Among children that did not attend religious classes at school, as many as 43 per cent received religious instruction at church.

Three-quarters of children not attending religious classes had fathers who never went to church, while one-fifth had fathers who went once a year – with the rest attending more often. That is to say, among more than 90 per cent of children completely "excluded" from religious education, the father had set a *pattern* of non-churchgoing. Conversely, however, a third of fathers who had participated in some kind of religious instruction never attended church services, while an additional 10 per cent went to church just once a year. It seems therefore that *the likelihood of participants in religious instruction seeing a secular behavioural pattern in their father was far greater than the likelihood of non-participants seeing a religious pattern in their father.*

Without exception, the fathers of children that never attended church services for children – or who only attended once a year – were to be found in the completely secularised group. Among the fathers of children that attended more regularly, 40 percent were secularised (and 26% never went to church). This means that as in the case of religious instruction, here too *the tendency to send children to church services (to activate them religiously) was stronger than a father's "own" religious activation*. On the other hand, not one of the 528 fathers that went to church at some time in the year, failed to send their children to church. And even among fathers that sent their children to church several times a month or more frequently, we still find a secularisation rate of 40 per cent. *That is to say, if we search for a social group that is churchgoing but denies its children religious education out of fear of the "communist ideological terror implemented by way of the school system", we do not find one.*

The survey also asked whether, as children, respondents had been "brought up in a religious way". Recollections in this area will obviously be subjective. Of the 40 per cent or so of parents who (according to the subjective recollections) "did not raise their child in a religious manner", approximately three-quarters were secularised also in respect of their churchgoing habits – although it is also true that one-tenth of this group went to church several times a month or more frequently. The contradiction is even greater, however, among those raising children in a religious manner: here, a quarter never went – as fathers – to church; and an additional 12 per cent only attended once a year.

It seems that – according to children's subjective recollections – the likelihood of children in religious families not being raised in a religious manner was greater than the likelihood of their not going to church or not attending religious classes.

This fact indicates that the theoretical expectations arising in the wider milieu of a religious family (norms that children may see practised by their grandparents, for instance) exceeded – in terms of their religiosity – the actual religious behaviour of the family. Churchgoing as a child and attending religious classes without the background of parental churchgoing and a religious upbringing, seem to be indicative of a life situation in which *formal religiosity is stronger than the subjective experience of religiosity.* This shows that although the state and public expectation required an education that was more secular than the

spontaneous demand arising from the real ideological situation, nevertheless formal religiosity was still stronger among certain social groups.

The religious sociological databases at our disposal reveal far more about the social context of religious education, but the scope of this paper does not allow for their presentation. Perhaps the above data and analyses are capable of demonstrating that even during the harshest periods of communist rule, people of religious faith and orientation did provide their children with religious education within the framework of family or church. All of this does not diminish the seriousness of the many conflicts that arose between religious people and the party state in the 1950s. Nevertheless, in order to properly understand the situation, we need to know about these factors – which also facilitate an understanding of the subsequent decline in religious instruction at school. This decline took place just as the dictatorship loosened its grip on society; it saw religious education participation rates among ten-year-olds fall to 44 per cent in the mid-1960s, 33 per cent around 1971, and 15 per cent around 1983. The place of religious education at school was gradually taken by religious instruction at church, which was systematically possible from the 1970s onwards.